

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, October 9, 2024

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: NORTH MAPLE REGIONAL PARK PROGRAM UPDATE
OCTOBER 2024

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update on projects and initiatives supporting the development of North Maple Regional Park (NMRP) and to receive Council direction on advancing discussions with Ontario Tennis Association for the development a Provincial Tennis Training Centre.

Report Highlights

- NMRP Program Committee and staff Collaboration Teams continue to meet monthly to discuss key project updates and progress.
- Construction of the Enabling Works site grading, servicing, and environmental works on 130 acres of parkland is nearing completion, including a major event lawn area and Vaughan's first cricket pitch for opening in 2025.
- Design of the Family Recreation Area is progressing and a procurement process is underway to begin construction in 2025.
- The Master Plan for NMRP was initiated and the first public engagement events were held over the summer.
- The Vaughan Soccer Club is advancing the design for a new artificial turf soccer field and air-supported dome in Phase 1 area of the park.
- The Ontario Tennis Association has renewed their interest in developing an indoor/outdoor tennis facility at NMRP; staff is seeking direction on this.
- Grant opportunities continue to be explored as an alternative funding source for potential programming at NMRP.

Recommendations

1. That Council direct staff to meet with the Ontario Tennis Association to explore the potential of developing a provincial tennis training facility on a portion of land at the North Maple Regional Park and report back to Council in January 2025.

Background

The 900-acre North Maple Regional Park (NMRP) is the City's most ambitious park development to date with a vision to create a nationally significant signature park and legacy project for future generations. Key objectives for implementing the NMRP vision are focused on activities related to restoring nature, sharing culture, promoting active living, and building community. Three key pillars are emerging to guide work on this amazing park: RESTORE, ENGAGE, PLAY.

In 2022 a NMRP Program Committee was established with Regional Councillor Ferri and Councillor Iafrate as Council Liaison Members to support the work of the NMRP Program team and staff Collaboration Teams. The NMRP Program Committee includes key Department Heads to provide alignment with priorities of this Term of Council and awareness of NMRP projects and programs that require cross-departmental coordination. The teams continue to meet monthly to discuss key project updates and progress.

Previous Reports/Authority

[North Maple Regional Park Family Recreation Area Update May 2024](#)

[North Maple Regional Park Program Update - September 2023](#)

Analysis and Options

Construction of the Enabling Works for the Phase 2 lands are nearing completion including construction of Vaughan's first cricket field and major event lawn area

Construction of Phase 2 Enabling Works are nearing completion with the re-opening of approximately 130 acres this year. The project included reconstructing the park driveway (Vaughan CARES Way); lane widening on Keele Street including dedicated traffic signals at the park entrance; approximately 4 kilometers of new pathways; a 6-metre wide accessible multi-use trail on the perimeter of the new road; pond and wetland restoration works and aquatic plantings. Bat boxes were installed in specific areas of the park as part of Species at Risk (SAR) permit regulations adding an interesting environmental element to the natural habitat of the park.

As part of the Phase 2 Enabling Works, Vaughan's first cricket field and major event lawn are now complete. The new cricket field includes three artificial turf wicket areas, batting cages with two additional artificial turf wicket areas, sight screens, scoreboard, and a spectator area with bleachers. The field is fully irrigated and equipped with sports field lighting. The cricket field will be ready for permitting in spring 2025.

The major event lawn area is also complete, with pathway lighting installation around the perimeter being planned for next year. The major event lawn is anticipated to host Canada Day celebration in July 2025.

The Family Recreation Area is advancing to final design with construction to start in 2025

Development of the Family Recreation Area (FRA) was identified as a Term of Council Priority with the vision to create a unique destination and play experience for Vaughan residents and visitors. The detailed design for the FRA and is advancing quickly to ensure timely delivery of the project. As the detailed design is nearing completion, preparation of the tender documents and construction specifications are underway. A Request for Pre-Qualification (RFPQ) process was completed in June 2024 with three (3) Contractors prequalified to bid on the subsequent tender. Construction is expected to begin in 2025. Key elements of the FRA project will include playground elements and water play; boardwalks and pathways; a skate loop; a pavilion building with four season washrooms/changeroom; a major picnic shelter and gardens.

The Master Plan and community engagement for the NMRP is underway with over 800 people having been engaged to help inform the park planning process

The NMRP Master Plan will help guide and establish the park as a major destination for the City while protecting and strengthening the park's natural attributes. Building on the key principles of restore, engage and play, the Master Plan will position the park to be a natural oasis that promotes both physical activity and mental well-being with multiple opportunities for active living, sports and recreation, arts and culture, outdoor play and passive recreation, while providing a place to build community. Operationally, the Master Plan will be used to inform decision making on level of service, park management, and budget.

Over the summer, a multifaceted engagement process was initiated to help ensure public input informs future park programming and development. The current engagement strategy is designed to help ensure the largest number of stakeholders are included, with a variety of opportunities for participation. Current engagement will build on previous public engagement efforts and focus on areas that are not planned or programmed. The first engagement events were initiated in June 2024. Staff, together with our consultants, attended many community events such as concerts in the park at Mackenzie Glen District Park and North Thornhill Community Centre, a pop-up at the Woodbridge farmers market, hosted a community event in NMRP, and engaged with youth at City-run summer camps. To date over 800 people have been engaged and informed on the Master Plan.

A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established, which includes a diverse group of residents, selected through an adaptive lottery process to provide feedback on the Master Plan. The objective of the CAC is to provide advice and feedback to help inform development of the park plan, while learning and listening to people from diverse experiences and perspectives on how the park can serve current and future communities. Three deep-dive workshops were also held in September, each focused on one of the key pillars – RESTORE, ENGAGE, PLAY. The purpose of the deep dive sessions is to have in-dept conversations with community members to further develop each of the key pillars.

Feedback received through the various public engagements and community events indicates significant community excitement and a strong desire for future programming at NMRP. Participants are eager for an enhanced park experience that includes access to nature, walking/hiking/biking trails, access to water, year-round programming for all-ages and abilities, sports facilities, off leash dog areas and supportive infrastructure like accessible washrooms and free parking.

Next steps are to confirm the park vision and guiding principles focused on the key pillars of RESTORE, ENGAGE, PLAY. Technical analysis and feedback received through engagement will be used to inform the draft park demonstration plan.

A storyboard sign will be installed this Fall to commemorate the history of the park and Vaughan CARES advocacy to close the Keele Valley Landfill Site

In collaboration with Vaughan CARES staff have developed interpretive signage that captures various milestones and timelines achieved by the association in appreciation of the group's long and successful campaign to close the Keele Valley Landfill Site. From their continued efforts, Vaughan CARES helped establish new environmental policies, legislation and strategies relating to sustainable and responsible waste management. Given this, opportunities for development in many areas of the City progressed and was made possible, including the rehabilitation of this site and the creation of NMRP.

As the park continues to evolve, various wayfinding projects will be implemented over the coming months. This includes the development of a park map and installation of more signage that will help to enhance park visitor experience and keep users informed. Additional locations for interpretive signage will be explored and identified through future wayfinding and signage strategic planning in the coming years.

Staff continue to meet with various organizations to explore potential partnership opportunities at the park

Many more park programs and facilities will be possible at NMRP as future phases of the park are implemented and additional lands are made ready for public use. Over the last number of years, staff have been exploring potential partnership opportunities for the development of park facilities and programs at NMRP to support implementing the park vision and to meet identified needs within the community.

Vaughan Soccer Club (VSC) – Soccer Field and Air-Supported Dome

In April 2024, Council approved the terms of a lease arrangement for the VSC to develop a new artificial turf field, air-supported dome and related facilities on a portion of NMRP lands. The agreement is being finalized and the club is currently advancing the design with construction to begin in 2025.

Gateway Parks Group (GPG) – Snow Tubing

In 2024 Council approved entering into a license agreement for GPG to develop and operate a seasonal snow tubing and winter recreation facility at NMRP. This will provide the opportunity for the City to offer unique, local winter recreation experiences, activities, and facilities at the park. Access to additional facilities and amenities at

NMRP may include gathering spaces and warming and viewing areas, concessions, and washrooms.

While it was anticipated to provide snow tubing operations for this winter season (2024/2025), due to unforeseen circumstances beyond GPG's control, the program is now delayed a season based on equipment delivery timing. Staff will continue to finalize and execute all necessary agreements with GPG. In the meantime, the toboggan area at NMRP will be complete and open for public recreation this winter.

Ontario Tennis Association (OTA) – Provincial Tennis Training Centre

In June 2024, staff received a letter from the OTA confirming an interest in partnering with the City to develop a Provincial Tennis Training Centre at NMRP. The proposal includes approximately ten (10) indoor and ten (10) outdoor tennis courts with dome to provide year-round programming, training facilities and administrative office space. Staff are seeking Council approval to further explore this proposal in detail.

Grant opportunities continue to be explored for NMRP

The NMRP team in collaboration with staff in Economic Development continues to actively explore grant opportunities to secure funding for upcoming park projects. Some of those grants include:

The Natural Infrastructure Fund (NIF) - Infrastructure Canada

In 2022, staff applied for \$250,000 in support of an "Eco-Classroom" for community engagement through Infrastructure Canada Natural Infrastructure Fund. The status of the City's application is still pending as Infrastructure Canada received a large number of funding applications to the NIF program, and the NIF team is currently working on assessing projects. Project objectives are to enhance and expand the local ecologic function of the existing wetland areas at NMRP, and to develop site features that promote and provide access to the public, school groups and events to function as an outdoor "Eco-Classroom" for community engagement.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund (GMF)

Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC) is an initiative delivered through FCM that supports planting trees across Canada. The NMRP team has applied for this grant in September 2024, to help support the planting design of the FRA in 2025-2026. This grant is currently in the application review process and the results will be communicated in time for Spring 2025 planting. The City has requested \$1,970,996 from this grant to support the Family Recreation Area plantings.

Natural Resources Canada's Zero Emission Vehicle Program (ZEVIP)

Approximately \$240,000 in funding has been secured from the Zero Emission Vehicle Program to install EV charging stations city-wide. NMRP has been identified as a new site and two Dual-Head Level 2 Electric Vehicle charging stations will be installed in the existing NMRP parking lot. A feasibility study for the entire City including NMRP is to be conducted by October 2024. This will lead to an RFP for installing the two vehicle charging stations and targeted to be completed by May 2025.

Ministry of Sport's Community Sport and Recreation Fund

The NMRP team in collaboration with Economic Development is preparing to submit an application for the recently announced Provincial Community Sport and Recreation Fund – Stream 2 this Fall to help with the funding of the FRA. The deadline for applications is on-going and grants will be awarded as applications are received.

Financial Impact

The NMRP Program continues to be funded from approved Capital Project PK-6636-19 which supports implementation of capital projects, consulting services, administration, and project management. Staff continue to seek potential partnerships and funding opportunities including Federal and Provincial grants, advertising, and program sponsorships to help advance the 900-acre vision for NMRP.

Operational Impact

Completion of the NMRP project requires continued discussion and coordination with various departments supporting the vision of the park, namely Parks Operations and Recreational Services who are ultimately the project clients.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Completion of the NMRP project requires continued discussion and coordination with a variety of external agencies and stakeholders, including communication plans and potential funding announcements as applicable.

Conclusion

Advancing the 900-acre vision for NMRP continues to be a Term of Council priority and transformation of the park continues. A dedicated staff team is in place to lead implementation of the NMRP Program, and a comprehensive work program is established to provide a clear plan, communications and timing that will guide park development over the next 10 years and beyond.

For more information, please contact: Jamie Bronsema, Director, Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development, extension 8858.

Attachment

1. North Maple Regional Park Program Priorities.

Prepared by

Jennifer Cappola-Logullo, Manager, NMRP Program, ext. 8433.